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CIA Inspires New TV Series as Image Changes

HOLLYWOOD (UPI) — The CIA — in disrepute since the hippies and yuppies found a political voice in the anti-establishment '60s — is the inspiration for a new TV series titled "The CIA."

The much abused Central Intelligence Agency, America's cloak and dagger guys who counter the Soviet Union's KGB operations throughout the world, apparently has regained some of its respectability and glamor.

But for many years the agency's recruitment of businessmen, journalists and students abroad brought howls of protest from liberals who cried that the CIA was suborning American morality.

Claims were also made that the agency was tinkering with all manner of constitutional guarantees and that it was being used for political purposes — spying on liberal groups and such.

CIA supporters, many of them from the political right, claimed the United States was being severely crippled in international politics and the arms race because of political tampering with our intelligence gathering agency.

"Like the FBI at the time, the CIA was much in the public eye, anathema to an organization which strives for covert operations.

"Increasing reports of Russian military superiority and a blizzard of stories — some news, others best-selling fiction — chronicling the U.S.S.R.'s spy network, is reversing public opinion toward the CIA.

Our agents are now the good guys. The Soviet spies are the villains.

Then, too, there's George Bush. The Republican vice presidential candidate is a former CIA director which does not seem to count against him.

But the man doing most to popularize the CIA as a beneficent American institution is attorney Larry Thompson of Hollywood.

Thompson, a Mississippiian, runs an entertainment conglomerate which manages the careers of many stars and includes a production arm. For almost five years Thompson has been trying to get "The CIA" on the air.

His quest for official CIA cooperation has been touch and go. Certainly, the secret agency couldn't open its files. Also, is it proper for the agency

The CIA's public image didn't help any.

But the temper of the country apparently has changed enough to insure that a show based on undercover American intelligence operations would have a good chance of succeeding.

Perhaps even more to the point, Thompson managed to get the CIA's endorsement without the agency's official sanction.

"We have the CIA's unofficial cooperation," Thompson said, "and an exclusive contract with the Association of Former Intelligent Officers (AFIO), an alumni group of the CIA sworn by contract to secrecy for life on classified material."

"With their help, we're going to film a series of one-hour fictional dramas based on actual covert operations.

"The AFIO will make sure everything is technically correct but not factual enough to identify actual operations. We will use fictional agents."

Thompson said "The CIA" cannot be compared to the defunct "FBI" series, explaining that CIA operations are an endless web of espionage without clearly defined story limitations — a beginning, middle and end.

He says if his series had a subtitle it would be "The Longest War."

"The CIA is more cerebral than the FBI," he said. "There is less action and gunplay. Stories involve the struggle for and the dissemination of information."

"The CIA could only close a case in the event of total world peace."

Thompson envisions the show as a combination of "Mission: Impossible" and "Sherlock Holmes." Many revolutionary, but declassified, undercover weapons will be seen, some almost rivaling "James Bond" hardware.

But most actual CIA apparatus techniques, contacts, drops, codes and other secret stuff will not be seen. Indeed, Thompson is not privy to them.

The series, moreover, will be shot entirely on foreign locations for the excellent reason that the CIA is not allowed by law to operate in the United States, according to Thompson.

"Former director Bill Colby says the public knows nothing about the CIA by design," Thompson said. "The fragments that are known have

been distorted because they are not perceived in the CIA structure as a whole.

"Our show is designed to entertain people and inform them at the same time. But it won't be a whitewash of the CIA. That's not our intent."

Thompson will film the show through 20th Century-Fox Television for CBS. It will not be ready for airing until 1981.

More than four years ago Thompson and ABC were close to bringing the show to TV but the CIA aborted the project when foreign allies' intelligence agencies expressed fears that their tactics and methods might be exposed.

"We solved that problem by doing away with official CIA cooperation," Thompson concluded. "And now that Americans have become patriotic again, we think the time for 'The CIA' is right."